

AUTUMN GEM

A Documentary on the Life
of China's First Feminist



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*With all my heart I beseech and beg
my two hundred million female compatriots
to assume their responsibility as citizens.
Arise! Arise! Chinese women, arise!¹
- Qiu Jin*

AUTUMN GEM is a documentary feature exploring the extraordinary life of China's first feminist, Qiu Jin (1875–1907). During the reign of China's last dynasty, Qiu Jin boldly challenged traditional gender roles and demanded equal rights and opportunities for women. An accomplished writer, women's rights activist, and leader of a revolutionary army, she emerged as a national heroine who redefined what it meant to be a woman in 20th-century China.

Using archival images, scholar interviews, and dramatic recreations based on Qiu Jin's original writings, the hour-long film creates an intimate portrait of the Chinese "Joan of Arc." Qiu Jin left behind a large body of literary work which serves as the foundation for staged recreations. Performed by actors in period dress and settings, they bring the story of Qiu Jin to life.

Shot on location in the U.S. and China, AUTUMN GEM stars former Chinese National Wushu Champion and Hollywood stunt actress Li Jing. It is produced and directed by two San Francisco Bay Area Chinese American filmmakers, Rae Chang and Adam Tow. The project's partners include the Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco, the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, and the Official Qiu Jin Museum in Shaoxing, China. The project is fiscally sponsored by the San Francisco Film Society.

I. CONTEXT

China's place on the world stage is of increasing interest to the United States. Its status as a global economic power marks its significance as a leading world player. Controversies surrounding the country's human rights, the rapid pace of its economic reforms, and its potential as a rising superpower have brought the country into sharper focus.

Yet China remains an enigma to many in the U.S. There is little knowledge of the country's history, and even less regarding the history of its women. The story of Qiu Jin and the women's emancipation movement in China, for example, is relatively unknown in the U.S. As China emerges as a prominent player on the global stage, it becomes crucial to understand its recent past and the often-neglected role of its women.

¹ Dooling, Amy and Torgeson, Kristina. *Writing Women in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press 1998) p. 44.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the twentieth century, China underwent a series of dramatic social and political changes. It saw an end to the dynasty system that had ruled for thousands of years and an emergence of a new republican form of government. Also during this period, for the first time in the country's history, small but vocal groups of women rose up and demanded equal rights and opportunities.

Qiu Jin was a seminal leader in both the revolutionary movement and the struggle for women's emancipation. An impassioned writer, orator, and educator, she dedicated herself to the fight for women's rights and the struggle to free the country from imperialism. Her radical ideology eventually led to her involvement in an attempted armed uprising against the government. She was accused of treason and executed at the age of thirty-two, becoming the first female martyr for the revolutionary cause.

Qiu Jin is celebrated as a national heroine in China today. She is the subject of several books, plays, and films in China, and memorialized in an official monument and museum.

III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

AUTUMN GEM brings the story of Qiu Jin to the screen in the form of an hour-long biographical documentary produced in HD video. The format consists of interviews with scholars and other experts, archival material, and dramatic recreations based on Qiu Jin's original writings.

Interviews with individuals who have published academic works on Qiu Jin are used to create talking heads segments for the film. Scholars and experts from both the U.S. and China are included to present a diverse range of perspectives.

Archival material (photographs, prints, historical documents) gathered from institutions in the U.S. and China are incorporated to create a strong visual reference of the period. In addition, key sites related to Qiu Jin's life are shown. These include her former residence in Shaoxing; the Datong School where she taught and trained student revolutionaries; the Monument to the Martyr Qiu Jin, built at the site of her execution; and her statue and tomb, located at West Lake in Hangzhou.

Staged readings of Qiu Jin's original work with actors in period dress and settings are used to bring the story to life. Qiu left behind a large body of literary work, including nearly two hundred poems, essays, speeches, letters to family and friends, and an autobiographical novel. These works serve as the foundation for dramatic readings that create a more intimate portrait of the subject and provide deeper insight into her personal life.

The events of Qiu Jin's life are told through interwoven segments of these three components, accompanied by an off-screen narrator in English. The documentary features a soundtrack of traditional Chinese music and songs from the historic time period.

IV. KEY PERSONNEL

Rae Chang (writer, director, producer, editor) is an artist and graphic designer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has worked in a variety of mediums including drawing, sculpture, performance, and video. Her work has been presented at Kearny Street Workshop's APature, the Chinese Culture Center, Pacific Film Archive, Worth Ryder Art Gallery, and New College of California Gallery. Trained in Chinese martial arts (wushu), she performs with the dance company Facing East Dance and Music.

Adam Tow (director, producer, director of photography, editor) is a digital media producer and web consultant. An accomplished photographer, his work has been published in *The New York Times*, *Stanford Magazine*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He has worked with artists including Vienna Teng, St. Lawrence String Quartet, Facing East Dance and Music, Beijing Wushu Team, and Somei Yoshino Taiko Ensemble. His corporate clients include *The Wall Street Journal*, All Things Digital, Stanford University, and various startups in the Bay Area.

Li Jing (principal actress) is a former professional athlete for the China National Wushu Team and trained under Wu Bin, the coach of Jet Li. She has twenty years of martial arts experience and expertise in a variety of styles and weapons, as well as special skills in fight choreography and wire work. She achieved Junior and Senior China National Champion titles over thirty times and was ranked one of the top six female wushu athletes in China. She has worked as a stunt actor for several film, television, and commercial projects in Hollywood.

Jean-Paul Jeanne (sound) is a graduate of Stanford University and Native American filmmaker and writer living in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has written several screenplays and short stories and produced multiple videos, including two videos for Stanford University. His independent short, DORMCEST, won the Back to School video contest on YouTube in 2005.

Advisory Board

C. C. Cheng is an Academician of Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He is currently Chair Professor of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language at Taiwan Normal University in Taipei. He taught at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, as Jubilee Professor of Linguistics and at City University of Hong Kong as Chair Professor of Linguistics and Chinese.

Amy Dooling is Associate Professor of Chinese Literature at Connecticut College. Her research interests include women's literary and cultural history and the feminist movement in Mainland China. She is the author of *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth-Century China* (Palgrave, 2005), co-editor and co-translator, with Kris Torgeson, of *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Literature by Chinese Women from the Early Twentieth Century* (Columbia University Press, 1998), and editor of the sequel volume *Writing Women in Modern China: The Revolutionary Years, 1936-1976* (Columbia, 2005).

Hu Ying is Associate Professor of Chinese literature at the University of California at Irvine. Her fields of interest include modern Chinese literature and culture, translation study, and

feminist theories. She is the author of *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1898 - 1918*, Stanford University Press, 2000.

Lingzhen Wang is Associate Professor of Chinese Literature and Cinema at Brown University. She specializes in modern Chinese literature and culture, gender and literary theory, film studies, and transnational feminism. She is the author of *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford University Press, 2004).

Support Organizations

San Francisco Film Society (fiscal sponsor) is a 501(c)(3) organization providing professional development, residencies, and fiscal sponsorship for independent filmmakers.

Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco (publicity and outreach partner) is a non-profit community organization focused on promoting Chinese and Chinese American art, history, and culture in the U.S. Established in 1965, the center offers a variety of educational programs, exhibits, and performances.

San Diego Chinese Historical Museum (research partner) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to collecting, preserving, and sharing Chinese and Chinese American history, culture, and art. Since its founding in 1996, it has presented over 39 historical and cultural exhibits to the public.

Official Qiu Jin Museum (research partner) was established by the People's Republic of China. Located at the site of her former residence in Shaoxing city, it serves as a historical landmark and houses various artifacts and research materials regarding Qiu Jin's life.